

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1898

AMEMBASSY DACCA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

USCINCPAC

USLO PEKING PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 14274

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, BG

SUBJ: INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

REF: DACCA 5119; NEW DELHI 14136

SUMMARY: RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH MEA OFFICIALS AND BANGLADESH DIPLOMATS HERE INDICATE THAT THERE ARE HIGHLY DIVERGENT OPINIONS ON BOTH SIDES AS TO THE STATE OF INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS. THE MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH SAW A POSSIBLE PROCLAMATION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE AS A PRELUDE TO HARRASSMENT OF THE HINDU COMMUNITY IN GANGLADESH AND AN EXODUS OF REFUGEES. THE MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR PAKISTAN AFFAIRS DID NOT FORESEE THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES PREDICTED BY HIS COLLEAGUE AS NECESSARILY FOLLOWING THE PROCLAMATION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE. THE TWO OFFICIALS ALSO HAD DIFFERENT OPINIONS AS TO WHETHER THE GOP WAS PRESSURING THE GOB TO DECLARE AN ISLAMIC STATE. THE JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH CITED ATTACKS ON INDIA IN THE BANGLADESH MEDIA AS EVIDENCE THAT THE GOB WAS NOT SUFFICIENTLY CONCERNED ABOUT ITS RELATIONS WITH INDIA. HE EXPRESSED STRONG

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DOUBTS ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE NEW REGIME IN DACCA.

THE BANGLADESH COUNSELOR AND THE FIRST SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS OFFERED DIFFERENT VIEWS CONCERNING GOB-GOI RELATIONS. THE COUNSELOR SAW NO SERIOUS PROBLEMS, WHILE THE FIRST SECRETARY COMPLAINED ABOUT ATTACKS ON THE GOB BY THE CPI PRESS FOR WHICH HE HELD THE GOI RESPONSIBLE. HE SAID THAT THE GOI WAS SUPPORTING ANTI-REGIME GROUPS WITHIN BANGLADESH. THE BANGLADESH MILITARY ADVISOR AND THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE BANGLADESH ARMY HAVE EXPRESSED AN AWARENESS OF GOI SENSITIVITIES AND DID NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF INDIAN INTERVENTION. THEY STATED THAT THEIR ARMY NEEDED ROLLING STOCK AND LIGHT AND MEDIUM ARTILLERY BUT RULED OUT CHINA, PAKISTAN AND THE US AS SOURCES OF SUPPLY. THEY SAID IT WOULD HAVE TO COME FROM UNNAMED THIRD COUNTRIES. FROM THE DIVERGENT OPINIONS HEARD IN MEA WE CONCLUDE THAT THE GOI HAS NOT MADE ANY FIRM POLICY DECISIONS CONCERNING BANGLADESH. HOWEVER, THERE ARE CONTINGENCIES SUCH AS A MASSIVE EXODUS OF REFUGEES OR THE EMERGENCE OF A PRO-PAKISTANI AND PRO-CHINESE REGIME IN DACCA WHICH WOULD CAUSE THE GOI TO INTERVENE--COVERTLY AND ULTIMATELY OVERTLY, IF NECESSARY--IN BANGLADESH. FOR THE MOMENT THE GOI'S CONCERN IS WITH POTENTIAL PROBLEMS. WE HAVE EMPHASIZED TO OUR INTERLOCUTORS IN BOTH CAMPS OUR INTEREST IN SUB-CONTINENTAL STABILITY AND IN RESPONSE TO AN INDIAN QUERY TOLD THEM THAT WE WERE NOT AWARE OF ANY USG PLANS TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH. WE ARE WARY ABOUT BECOMING A CHANNEL TO COMMUNICATE INDIAN WARNINGS TO BANGLADESH ON MATTERS SUCH AS THE ISLAMIC STATE. END SUMMARY.

1. AS SEEN FROM THE INDIAN SIDE--IN CONVERSATION WITH THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR, OCTOBER 24, MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH AJMANI EMPHASIZED ONE POINT REPEATEDLY AND URGED USG TO COMMUNICATE IT TO THE GOB: THE GOI COULD NOT HAVE "FRIENDLY RELATIONS" WITH THE GOB, IF BANGLADESH IS MADE AN ISLAMIC STATE. THIS CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY OTHERS SUCH AS A CHANGE IN THE FLAG AND THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, ALL OF WHICH WOULD SERIOUSLY RISK UNLEASHING MOSLEM HOSTILITIES AGAINST THE HINDU COMMUNITY IN BANGLADESH. GIVEN THE OVERPOPULA-

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TION OF EASTERN INDIA, THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO ROOM TO ACCOMMODATE AN EXODUS OF HINDUS FROM BANGLADESH. THEY WOULD HAVE TO BE RETURNED, AND AJMANI STRONGLY IMPLIED THAT THIS WOULD BE DONE WITH WHATEVER MEANS WERE NECESSARY. INDIA, AJMANI SAID, HAD AS MUCH RIGHT TO CONCERN ITSELF WITH THE SECULAR STATUS OF BANGLADESH AS PAKISTAN WOULD IF INDIA WERE TO PROCLAIM ITSELF A HINDU STATE, AND THIS WOULD BE A LEGITIMATE CONCERN FOR THE GOP.

AJMANI SAID THAT THE GOI HAS COMMUNICATED ITS CONCERNS TO THE GOB BUT BELIEVES THAT IT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL FOR THE USG TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE ALSO. THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR DID NOT OFFER AN OPINION AS TO THE DEPARTMENT'S LIKELY REACTION TO THIS REQUEST.

2. AJMANI SAID GOI IS CONVINCED THAT OTHERS, PARTICULARLY THE PAKISTANIS AND SAUDIS, ARE PRESSURING THE GOB TO DECLARE AN ISLAMIC STATE. BECAUSE OF ITS ECONOMIC NEEDS THE GOB MIGHT DO THIS. AJMANI STRESSED THAT THIS WAS VERY SHORTSIGHTED, AS IN THE LONG RUN THE GOI COULD HELP BANGLADESH MORE THAN THESE OTHER COUNTRIES. HE REFERRED TO INDIAN SUGAR AND COTTON SURPLUSES WHICH COULD BE ELEMENTS IN AID TO BANGLADESH AND TO TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WHICH WOULD ULTIMATELY HAVE A GREATER IMPACT ON BANGLADESH DEVELOPMENT THAN IMMEDIATE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. POSSIBILITY OF SUCH ASSISTANCE, AJMANI SAID, HAS BEEN MADE CLEAR TO BANGLADESH HIGH COMMISSION HERE. THE GOI, AJMANI SAID, IS HOPEFUL THAT US ASSISTANCE WILL ENABLE THE GOB TO RESIST PRESSURES OF THOSE WHO SEEK TO MAKE BANGLADESH AN ISLAMIC STATE.

3. INDIA, FOR ITS PART, AJMANI CLAIMED, IS DOING EVERYTHING TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE GOB. ECONOMIC AND MILITARY TRAINING ASSISTANCE WERE BEING CONTINUED AT THEIR PRE-COUP LEVELS. AJMANI DID NOT THINK, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOB WAS SUFFICIENTLY CONCERNED ABOUT MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH INDIA AND CITED ATTACKS ON INDIA IN THE BANGLADESH PRESS AND ON GOVERNMENT RADIO. ASKED TO BE MORE SPECIFIC, AJMANI PARTICULARLY REFERRED TO A SEPTEMBER 2: PRESS ATTACK ON INDIA AND MRS GANDHI. HE DID NOT SEE THE ABSENCE OF ANYTHING MORE RECENT AS EVIDENCE OF A CHANGED ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF
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THE GOB. AJMANI ALSO SAW CERTAIN PRO-PAKISTANI APPOINTMENTS WITHIN THE GOB AS EVIDENCE OF AN ANTI-INDIAN ATTITUDE. AS FOR GOB COMPLAINTS ABOUT ATTACKS AGAINST IT IN THE CPI PRESS, AJMANI SAID THAT THE GOI HAD NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM ALTHOUGH HE ACKNOWLEDGED HE HAD NOT DISCOURAGED "BLITZ" FROM CRITICIZING THE BANGLADESIS WHEN ASKED BY A "BLITZ" CORRESPONDENT.

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O P 250830Z OCT 75

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1899

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

USLO PEKING PRIORITY

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4. THE NEW REGIME IN BANGLADESH IN AJMANI'S VIEW LACKED A POLITICAL BASE AND THERE WERE GREAT DANGERS OF INSTABILITY. THERE WERE NO INDICATIONS THAT IT COULD DEAL WITH THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEMS OF THE COUNTRY NOR IMPROVE THE BUREAUCRACY, REDUCE CORRUPTION OR RESTORE DEMOCRACY AS PROMISED. AJMANI THOUGHT THAT THE LEGEND OF MUJIB WOULD RETURN TO HAUNT THOSE NEW IN POWER.

5. WEST BENGAL CHIEF SECRETARY GUPTA TOLD CONGEN CALCUTTA ON OCTOBER 24 THAT THE WEST BENGAL/BANGLADESH BORDER REMAINS QUIET. A MIDDLE LEVEL INDIAN ARMY OFFICER IN THE N.E. COMMAND ON OCTOBER 20 TOLD A CONGEN CALCUTTA OFFICER THAT MOST OF THE OFFICERS IN HIS COMMAND'S OPERATIONS SECTION WERE ON LEAVE FOR THE DUSSERA HOLIDAY SEASON. GUPTA ALSO SAID THERE ARE NO REFUGEES COMING ACROSS THE BORDER AND THE BANGLADESH AUTHORITIES ARE "TAKING GOOD CARE OF THE HINDU MINORITY."

6. A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE IN MEA TOWARD INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS WAS INDICATED BY THE JOINT SECRETARY FOR PAKISTAN AFFAIRS, ASHOK CHIB IN AN OCTOBER 24 CONVERSATION. HE DID NOT THINK THAT THE PROCLAMATION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE
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WOULD NECESSARILY LEAD TO REPRESSION OF THE HINDU COMMUNITY, AND SAID HE HAD SEEN NO EVIDENCE PAKISTAN WAS

ENCOURAGING MUSTAQUE TO DECLARE AN ISLAMIC STATE, AND OBSERVED HE THOUGHT TOO MUCH WAS BEING MADE BY SOME PEOPLE OF THE WHOLE ISLAMIC STATE ISSUE. HE SAID THAT INDIA WOULD HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE WHAT ACTUALLY TRANSPIRED IN ORDER TO DETERMINE AN APPROPRIATE REACTION. CHIB, LIKE AJMANI, MADE IT CLEAR THAT REPRESSION OF THE HINDU MINORITY OR AN EXODUS OF REFUGEES INTO INDIA WOULD PROVOKE A STRONG INDIAN REACTION. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, HE TOOK A MUCH SOFTER LINE TOWARD THE GOB THAN DID THE JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH AFFAIRS.

7. AS SEEN BY BANGLADESH DIPLOMATS IN NEW DELHI--THE BANGLADESH COUNSELOR, A.H.S. ATAUL KARIM, WHO IS ALWAYS LOW KEY IN HIS DISCUSSIONS, ON OCTOBER 24 SAID THAT THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS IN GOI-GOB RELATIONS. HOWEVER, THE FIRST SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, ZIAUS SHAMS CHOWDHURY, HAD PREVIOUSLY INDICATED GREAT ANXIETY ABOUT POSSIBLE GOI REACTIONS TO THE GOB'S ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN AND THE PRC. CHOWDHURY MADE MUCH OF THE ATTACKS ON THE GOB IN THE INDIAN COMMUNIST PRESS FOR WHICH HE HELD THE GOI RESPONSIBLE. HE SAID THAT INDIA WAS SUPPORTING ANTI-REGIME GROUPS WITHIN BANGLADESH BUT WOULD NOT (OR COULD NOT) BE MORE SPECIFIC. HE INDICATED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS FULLY AWARE OF INDIAN CONCERNS ABOUT THE WELL-BEING OF THE HINDU COMMUNITY IN BANGLADESH AND WAS ENSURING THAT IT WAS NOT DISTURBED. (AJMANI HAD DISCOUNTED THE INFLUENCE OF THE BANGLADESH FOREIGN OFFICE WITH THE POWERS IN DACCA.)

8. IN A MEETING WITH OUR ASSISTANT ARMY ATTACHE, OCTOBER 24, THE BANGLADESH MILITARY ADVISOR, BRIG M.A. MANZUR, AND MGEN H.M. BRSHAD, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE BANGLADESH ARMY (NOW ATTENDING THE INDIAN NATIONAL DEFENSE COLLEGE), SAID THAT THE TWO SIDES HAD ADOPTED A "WAIT AND SEE" POLICY. "INDIA HAS TO WATCH US VERY CAREFULLY, AND WE KNOW IT." THEY INDICATED THAT AN ANTI-INDIAN AND PRO-PAKISTANI/PRC POSITION MIGHT GIVE RISE TO INDIAN INTERVENTION IN BANGLADESH. ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE FOOLHARDY FOR INDIA TO DO THIS, MANZUR SAID, IT WAS
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A POSSIBILITY WHICH COULD NOT BE EXCLUDED. AS FOR THE MATERIEL NEEDS OF THE BANGLADESH ARMY, MANZUR AND ERSHAD SAID THERE ARE ALREADY MANY CHINESE SMALL ARMS IN THE BANGLADESH ARMY INVENTORY. THE PRINCIPAL NEED IS FOR TRUCKS AND JEEPS AND LIGHT AND MEDIUM ARTILLERY. THEY RULED OUT CHINA AND PAKISTAN AS A SOURCE OF SUPPLY AS BOTH ARE CONSIDERED "POLITICALLY VOLATILE." YUGOSLAVIA HAD BEEN CONSIDERED A POSSIBLE SOURCE, BUT THIS ALSO HAD BEEN DROPPED. BOTH ERSHAD AND MANZUR RULED OUT THE US AS

A SOURCE OF SUPPLY AND WOULD ONLY SAY THAT THE EQUIPMENT WOULD HAVE TO COME FROM UNNAMED THIRD COUNTRIES.

9. COMMENT: WE HAVE REPORTED EXTENSIVELY ON OUR RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH BOTH INDIAN AND BANGALEE OFFICIALS HERE TO INDICATE THE RANGE OF DIVERSITY OF VIEWS WE ARE ENCOUNTERING. OUR PRIMARY CONCUSION FROM CONVERSATIONS IN MEA IS THAT BOTH HAWKS AND DOVES ARE FLUTTERING, AND THAT DESPITE THE "FIRE AND SMOKE" WHICH AJMANI BREATHES AS JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH (THIS HAS BEEN HIS STYLE FOR SOME TIME), IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT NO FIRM POLICY DECISIONS HAVE BEEN MADE AT SENIOR GOI LEVELS ON INDO-BANGALEE RELATIONS EXCEPT POSSIBLY IN THE EVENT OF A MASSIVE EXODUS OF REFUGEES INTO INDIA. THE ISSUE OF AN ISLAMIC STATE IS SENSITIVE IN CERTAIN QUARTERS AND SHOULD BANGLADESH MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION (AND WE TOLD BOTH AJMANI AND CHIB WE HAD NO EVIDENCE FROM THE REPORTING OF EMBASSY DACCA THAT THERE WAS ANY ACTIBE THINKING ALONG THESE LINES), THERE WOULD AT THE LEAST PROBABLY BE SOME HARDENING OF THE INDIAN POSITION ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY THE TYPE OF UNEQUIVOCAL ANTAGONISM VOICED BY AJMANI.

10. WE EMPHASIZED TO BOTH CHIB AND AJMANI OUR INTEREST IN SUBCONTINENTAL STABILITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD RELATIONS AMONG ALL THE STATES IN THE AREA, AND NOTED THAT WE UNDERSTOOD THE GOP HAD EXPRESSED ITS OWN CAUTIONARY NOTE TO BANGLADESH ON ITS DEALINGS WITH INDIA. WE TOLD AJMANI IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM HIM THAT WE WERE NOT AWARE OF ANY USG PLANS TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH. IF THE USG WERE TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH, WE HAVE LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE INDIANS WOULD BRISTLE. THERE MIGHT BE TYPES

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OF EQUIPMENT WHICH WOULD BE THE MARGIN OF INDIAN CONCERN (POSSIBLY LIGHT HELICOPTERS OR TRUCKS) BUT THE NOTION OF ANY US SUPPLIES TO THE ARMY WOULD WORRY TH GOI AS TO WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE IN THE WIND. IN THE SAME WAY, THE INDIANS WILL WATCH CAREFULLY TO SEE IF ANY GOP-OWNED US EQUIPMENT REACHES BANGLADESH.

11. WE ARE WARY ABOUT BECOMING A CHANNEL FOR INDIAN WARNINGS TO BANGLADESH ON MATTERS SUCH AS THE "ISLAMIC" ISSUE, BUT CONCEIVABLY THE CONCERN OF AT LEAST SOME INDIANS ABOUT THIS QUESTION MIGHT BE COMMUNICATED TO BANGLADESH OFFICIALS IN THE COURSE OF GENERAL CONVERSATION. WE WOULD OURSELVES BE INTERESTED IN EMBASSY DACCA'S VIEW OF THE RELEVANCE AND VITALITY OF THIS ISSUE IN BANGLADESH AT THIS TIME.

12. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH INDIA WOULD INTERVENE--COVERTLY AND ULTIMATELY OVERTLY, IF NECESSARY--IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS INTERESTS IN BANGLADESH AND THAT THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD INCLUDE MASSIVE MIGRATION OF HINDUS OR THE EMERGENCE OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH APPEARED TO BE PRO-CHINESE AND PRO-PAKISTANI. AS INDICATED ABOVE, AND IN OTHER RECENT REPORTING, THE GOI DOES NOT NOW SEE PROBLEMS WHICH CAUSE IT SERIOUS CONCERN; IT IS ONLY WORRYING ABOUT POTENTIAL PROBLEMS. FINALLY, WE WOULD ASSUME THAT THE GOI IS NOW DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING ASSETS WITHIN BANGLADESH FOR THE PURPOSE OF INFLUENCING THE SITUATION SHOULD THE FEARED PROBLEMS ARISE.

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